

EXPERIMENTAL PHOTOGRAPHY: An interview with Victoria Fu

Charlotte Cotton: Victoria, it's great to have a chance to talk to you about experimentation and your wonderful film *Télévoix 1*. At times, while I am watching, I feel like I am sitting in your studio, working on the desktop with you, there as you manually manipulate experimental set-ups with light and liquid, before you take us 'outside' into nature and we gather field recordings to bring back into the studio. *Télévoix 1* is an enveloping experience. Can you tell me about what your film represents for you, and what you hope the experience is for viewers?

Victoria Fu: *Télévoix 1* is a moving image work and the title is a poetic reference to a game of telephone or 'Chinese Whispers' where a group is in a circle and one person whispers to the person to their right, who then tries to repeat the same phrase to the person to their right, and so on. I imagine the images playing out as 'voices' - something both intimate and distant - with the loss of information of each subsequent iteration. It also suggests something also completely automated or non-human, which also gets at the question of loss of the starting point in a different way.

Charlotte Cotton: The software/pixel realm automates so many of the steps that - in analogue and chemical photography and film - are points of decision and consequence. Even though you are an artist who makes no direct distinctions between analogue and digital ideation, I am curious to know whether you think there are greater restrictions or freedoms to be found in digital processes and[/or] at what point in your creative path do you feel like you fully naturalized desktop software as a creative and experimental space for you - or, indeed, whether you would say it's a naturalized approach for you.

Victoria Fu: The imagery of *Télévoix 1* were generated by shooting 16-millimeter film footage of celestial and spectral desktop screensavers, and also of the actual sky at different times of day. During the shooting, the negative film was sometimes exposed to light to achieve chance film flares and flashes in the footage. The negatives were then hand-processed, leaving in the dirt, and hairs, etc. to intentionally interfere with the film processing and it scratched the emulsion to create a very definite sense of textural and painterly effects. In the studio, I shot video of numerous still life set-ups incorporated the hand movements and green[screen] materials in order to composite these elements together. In the editing room, I combined the still life videos with the original 16-millimeter footage as well as clips sourced from the Internet and brought them all into the same cinematic plane. Clearly I am not only using post-production tools but also revealing their powerful role in making the 'magic' of an image. The video is about the various gestures and ingredients that go into the film's own making - exposing its layers and sounds.

Charlotte Cotton: The title of this exhibition - Experimental Photography - intentionally speaks to both the creative license that you and the other participating artists bring into our contemporary digital image environment but also the 'DNA' of photography and film. How would you describe your relationship with media histories, are you intentionally drawing from them? What do you call forth/summon from them?

Victoria Fu: As with many of my moving image pieces, my singular goal is to make you think about the act of watching and at moments, watch yourself watching, so to speak. This is not a new idea by any means: it is modernism at its most raw, minimalism perceived from your body, avant-garde cinema at its

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best. However, I'm not willing to give up the allure of gorgeous film, in fact I am all about amping it up as much as I can. I want you to lose yourself in the spectacle but keep your head clear. Therein lies the dynamic I'm setting up: in and out of illusion; having it both ways; being steeped in the narrative and aware of your physicality in the room of the gallery.

Within the creative decisions I make for the works, they usually involve the creation and destruction of narrative space and time - something that has been played with since the dawn of cinema and certainly within experimental and avant-garde cinema and is now a regular strategy of mainstream media. I pace this dynamic to a particular rhythm, one that perhaps is in sync with how I browse the Internet and is a rhythmic response to my (short) attention span. It also plays out in the visual and sonic layers so that you get lulled into one layer while cognizant of another. The layers coalesce into coherent cinematic space, only to fall apart at moments where the flat layers of images reveal themselves, or the perceived space is interrupted by another object. An example is the screen showing a sky-like atmosphere of color while hearing sounds from my studio of me producing this experience for you. This is followed by an immersion in liquid and a giant hand landing with a 'splat' on the glass of the screen.

This dynamic often mixes with and entails the physical installation of the Téléoix 1. Some installations intentionally reflect the architecture of the gallery space, which can resonate as yet another layer from the video. Or it can be installed on a monitor-like screen to convey a sense of omniscience at the 'computer operator' level. To that end, the rise of the touchscreen has heavily influenced my work in the studio as it has added another element to cinematic spaces - the responsive, touchscreen plane. I play with our perception and assumption of the touchscreen's existence on a cinematic scale - can we expect it to exist while we are immersed in a narrative? Can it be immersive while rendered highly manipulable? This is a new ontology of spectatorship - the expectation that we touch the screen, that we can manipulate the image, and that there is always someone at the 'controller', keyboard or haptic interface.

Charlotte Cotton: How would you describe the impact of our image environment upon the choices that you make - or the viewership you anticipate - for your work? I think I am asking you about what you are asking us to pay attention to.

Victoria Fu: In some ways, we have been training to spectate like this in recent years. I find it hard these days to sit through an entire feature film without engaging in another screen or another mode of watching. We have also shifted to the assumption that there is an outside operator manipulating the image we spectate, or that the images we see have been or can be altered in some way. That's a big change since the era of pre-Netflix. Said in this way, perhaps it can be empowering - spectating with all faculties alert and aware, more active choice and the ability to skim until more deeply engaged? These are shifts I think about when I create work, and they stand as the backdrop of the experiences I am making.

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Victoria Fu**



Installation views, Markus Elbaus



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EXPERIMENTAL PHOTOGRAPHY
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Experimental Photography draws together six innovative contemporary American artists who are re-shaping photography's 200-year history of experimentation with new ideas and processes. Their photographic practices include fusing analogue traditions and materials with pixel-based software and new printing and image-rendering technologies. Within a contemporary creative context, the material presence of photographs is an ever-changing experience - the scope of which is set well beyond the confines of artistic practice per se, and in the realms of Web 2.0 and the 'cloud' of networked images. This exhibition offers up a range of active and subjective choices made by artists to transform and translate images into tangible objects, harnessing the experimental potential of a collective 'image environment'.

In this era of unprecedented compatibility and transparency between viewers and artists, the artists presented here are at the forefront of a dynamic facet of contemporary art photography that intentionally speaks to the universality of digital image capturing and sharing which permeates daily life. Through their work, we experience the physical implications of operating in this utterly new media environment, where the origination, behaviour, and reading of photographs have been culturally upended, and we are invited into the experimental terrain that extends before our eyes.

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